

VII.—BLACK PANTHERS.

As you will have gathered from another letter I am keenly interested in albinism in birds and animals; but to go to the other end of the scale I am interested in melanism too, although so far my experience has been confined to panthers only.

Black panthers are commonly considered to be freaks, specimens occurring in normal litters. But I have succeeded in breeding them 'true to type' and my experience has been that a pair of black panthers will always produce black cubs. My first female cub was obtained from the Straits Settlements, in which parts they are found more frequently than elsewhere. This cub, like others of its kind, had a vile temper and tried to scratch a couple of tigers in an adjoining cage, with the result that the tigers got annoyed and pulled the panther's shoulder right out of its socket through the bars. I put this cub ($\frac{3}{4}$ grown) out of its misery with a bullet.

I next got a female from Jamnagar and a full-grown pair (trapped wild) from Singapore and put the three together in a cage. The Singapore female was apparently barren; so I got rid of her. The others two bred as follows:—

(a) 1st litter, 2 cubs, male and female, both black. They came to a sad end when a few days old, as the mother refused to feed one and drowned the other in her drinking water through.

(b) 2nd litter, 2 cubs, male and female, both black. I still have them.

(c) 3rd litter, 2 cubs, both male, both black. The mother killed one by sitting on it and the other is still with me.

The mother and daughter (b) have both been put back to the sire (Singapore male) and are now in whelp.

The sire is jet black but the mother shows faint rosettes when in the sunlight. All adults are of good size and more 'thick set' in build than the normal panther. A peculiarity about them is that the fore legs are shorter than the hind legs, which makes them slope slightly towards the head, like Siamese cats (which small relative also originated from the regions noted for black panthers).

The cubs are born with a chocolate coloured milk coat with rather prominent rosettes; these latter gradually fade as the cubs grow older and the coat becomes blacker. I have noticed that cubs in succeeding litters appear to have rosettes more faintly marked than in previous litters.

The temper of both cubs and adults can only be described as vile. Panthers are notoriously 'uncertain'; but black panthers are real 'limbs of Satan': Normal panthers are comparatively docile. Gestation period is about 14-15 weeks. My records show mating 15-1-39, cubs born 16-5-39; Mating 2-3-40 cubs, born 20-6-40.

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